



Neuroinclusive design

How to embed neuroinclusive design into your organisation to unlock productivity and innovation

Contents

Auticon x Peter Griffiths	p.3
Introduction to neurodiversity	p.4
Neuroinclusive design	p.7
Building access	p.8
Layout	p.9
Wayfinding	p.10
Lighting	p.12
Acoustics	p.13
Temperature	p.14
Workstation Design	p. 15
Décor and Materials	p.18
Catering and Refreshment Spaces	p.19
Quiet and Restorative Spaces	p.20
External space	p.21
Commute	p.22
Reasonable adjustments, assistive aids and technology	p.23
References	p.24



Introduction

auticon is **an award-winning social innovation company operating in 15 countries**, dedicated to working in partnership with organisations to support them in becoming more **neuroinclusive**. Our primary mission is to combat employment disparities faced by neurodivergent adults while highlighting the strengths of neurodiversity within society.

By partnering with auticon, clients receive access to a complete suite of neuroinclusion services designed to raise the standards for inclusion, provide the needed support, and create a place where neurodivergent employees feel they belong.

We build on over 10 years of lived experience as a majority-autistic company using our expertise to guide clients through all areas of neuroinclusion.

auticon provides advice to organisations on how to create, develop and improve their teams and processes to be neurodiverse. We help clients transform HR practices, managers become neuro-confident, raise business-wide understanding and, most importantly, transform careers and provide thriving opportunities to neurodivergent talent globally.

Work with us to review your current neuro-inclusion status, identify what you're doing well at, what we can help to improve, and learn about the gaps we can recommend solving. We will offer tailored and flexible options that work for your organisation, your neurodivergent colleagues and managers.

Transforming your office into a forward-thinking neuroinclusive workspace can be an exciting and rewarding experience that benefits your entire workforce.

Getting design right increases productivity, wellbeing, innovation, satisfaction and retention.



Benefits of getting design right



People

Enhanced collaboration and innovation

- Diverse perspectives
- Improved communication

Increased job satisfaction and retention

- Reduced levels of stress
- Employees feel empowered and understood



Business

Competitive Advantage

- Improved recruitment of key skills and talent
- Positive Company Image

Increased Performance

- Diversity of thought leads to enhanced problem-solving
- Increased efficiency especially within your neurodivergent employees

Financial Benefits

- Reduced turnover and turnover costs
- Increased innovation and growth



Workplace

Inclusive Culture

- Equity and fairness
- Increased company morale

Adaptable Work Environment

- Flexible workspaces
- Improved community engagement



Our approach to neuroinclusion

Our Neuroinclusion Services has grown from our unique expertise and extensive experience with hundreds of neurodivergent individuals working among private and public employers

Our neuroinclusion services came about as an evolution of our organisation. auticon started off as an IT consultancy, but through our conversations with our clients, it became clear that more organisations were beginning to understand the value of a neurodiverse workforce.

Our proprietary software application, ñima, gathers and analyses survey data to deliver a precise overview of a client company's neuroinclusion maturity. Through detailed reporting, it offers a comprehensive tool for assessing progress, achieving neurodiversity goals, and identifying areas for improvement.

ñima enables clients to gain deeper insights into their organization, people, and challenges, revealing opportunities to achieve commercial, ESG, and social-impact objectives through neuroinclusion.

Our neuroinclusive service identifies barriers to recruiting and retaining a neurodiverse workforce. This suite of services provides solutions to an organisation including coaching, training, documentation reviews, consultancy and architectural design.

Working with:

auticon is working with urban thought leader, **Peter Griffiths** who brings 20 years of experience helping organisations to change environments to enable human flourishing.

Peter's experience includes:

- Shaping global city and place brands, with a focus on talent, investment and innovation.
- Advocating for neurodiversity and its inclusion in providing new solutions to complex challenges.
- Leveraging a background in journalism, communications and academia to influence stakeholders to embrace change.
- Keynote speaker, writer and facilitator empowering teams to design more inclusive futures that benefit everybody.



Why is neuroinclusion important?

Neurodiversity acknowledges the inherent variation in human neurological traits, which cannot be altered, making it essential for organisations to embrace inclusivity due to the societal and commercial benefits it brings. This includes:

- Ensuring workplaces are inclusive, accommodating, and supportive, **provides equity** for all employees.
- A neurodiverse workforce **enhances adaptability and innovation**, as different cognitive approaches contribute to a more resilient and dynamic business environment; benefiting employee morale and engagement.
- Recognising and accepting **neurodiversity contributes to a more accepting and harmonious society** by challenging stereotypes and reducing stigma linked to difference.
- Designing an accessible workplace can remove barriers by supporting with common challenges faced by neurodivergent employees. Making you more likely **to attract and retain** a diverse workforce.

1 in 5
employees are
neurodivergent

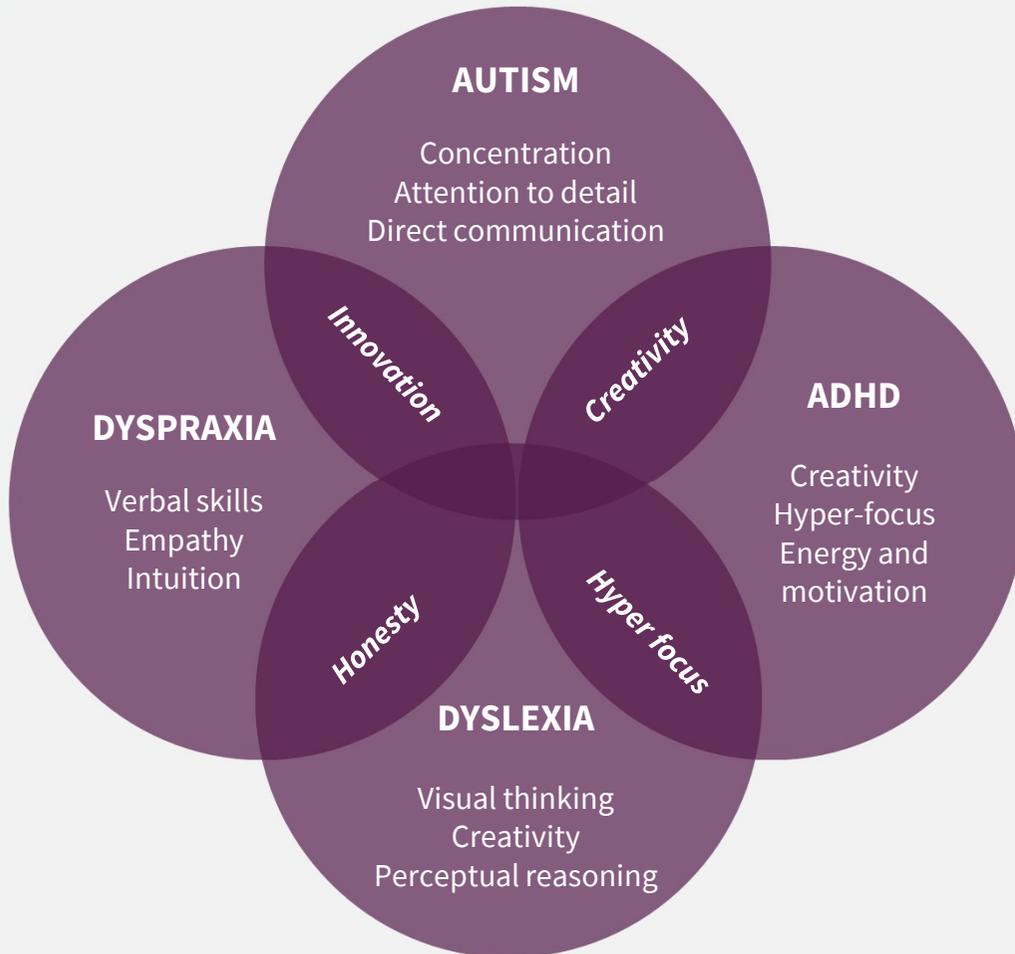
Enabled
neurodivergent
teams can be
30% more
productive

15% of
neurodivergent
respondents left a
job due to the
design of the
workplace

22% of
neurodivergent
applicants have
declined a job
offer due to office
features



Why is neuroinclusion important?



Barriers from the workplace can exacerbate common challenges faced by neurodivergent employees including sensory sensitivities, executive functioning and communication. Developing an accessible neuroinclusive design is imperative to supporting and retaining your workforce.

In an inclusive and accessible environment, neurodivergent individuals can display a range of cognitive abilities in different areas including attention to detail, pattern recognition, logical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, hyperfocus, and exceptional memory skills.

*The above image provides only some examples of strengths in relation to several neurodivergent conditions.



Neuroinclusive design

There are many elements that make up a neuroinclusive workplace. However, the topic of design is often forgotten when considering the accessibility needs of neurodivergent people. As a result, inaccessible workspaces create barriers for neurodivergent individuals to access and sustain employment. Further, the design barriers present in the workplace and beyond can have a direct, negative impact on the health and wellbeing on neurodivergent people.

It important to note that neuroinclusive design overlaps greatly with designing for improved health and wellbeing. Meaning that in addition to supporting your neurodivergent employee population, you will also support your entire workforce.

94% of people on the spectrum will have **anxiety** in their lifetime.

83% of people on the spectrum will have **depression** in their lifetime

Sensory processing differences

The most common workplace challenges centre around the topic of sensory processing differences. Sensory processing describes how we perceive, process and respond to information received through the senses. For many neurodivergent people, the sensory information present in everyday life can be overwhelming (hypersensitivity), for others they experience a decreased response to sensory stimuli (hyposensitivity). it is very common for individuals to experience a mix of both hyper- and hypo- sensitivities.

of autistic people process **sensory information** differently.

How an individual processes sensory information can impact wellbeing and vary over time, contexts and environments.

90%

For example, this could mean finding bright lights and everyday sounds overwhelming, difficulties responding to verbal cues e.g., the sound of your name being called across the room, challenges recognising pain, seeking out lights/patterns or needing to move around frequently.



User experiences is not just A to B

Greater sensory awareness means neurodivergent individuals often have a more complicated user experience when travelling from home to work. Small inconsistencies or unexpected events can impact on the ability for employees to feel secure and engage with their work.

Understanding the full user experience journey can help organisations think about the impact of their building design, operational and management choices on people who are wired to perceive sensory and communicative inputs differently.



Building access

Creating a neuroinclusive building starts with ensuring accessible entry points and clear, concise communication about the building's layout and features.

- Clear entrance and exit
- Reception positioned near main point of entry
- Reception area sufficiently signposted as an information/help desk
- Comfortable waiting area for individuals to sit
- Books, magazines, and/or puzzles provided to help reduce the anxiety of waiting
- Provide neuroinclusion awareness training to reception staff
- Clear entrance to and from parking



A Microsoft lobby with an accessible reception desk



Building access

Communicating about your building

Create a handbook to provide written guidance on navigating the workspace reduces reliance on memory and allows employees to access all the information they need, whenever they need to. Include:

- Videos or pictures of the building
- Information on how to travel to the office e.g., location and address, bus/train routes and walking distance
- Accessing the building for the first time e.g., how to apply for and collect security pass
- Information on the office layout e.g., different work areas available, sensory maps
- Information on facilities e.g., cafeteria opening times, how to access showers/lockers
- How to book desks/parking
- Key points of contact with numbers and email addresses e.g., reception staff with pictures, security staff, designated staff members



Example from roommanger.com



Layout

How to make the best use of space

There are always ways to utilise your existing space using things like colour, furniture and zoning. EXPAND ON THIS

As we continue to see the shift to hybrid working, we also see many businesses prioritising open interaction spaces and hotdesking which may present with a new series of challenges and require some consideration.

However, having spaces which can be used flexibly and meet the various needs of your workforce can support.

Working with a large, open plan space can be challenging. To help alleviate some of the challenges, you should consider ways to create smaller spaces by using effective zoning for your needs.

Open plan hot-desking considerations

Pros

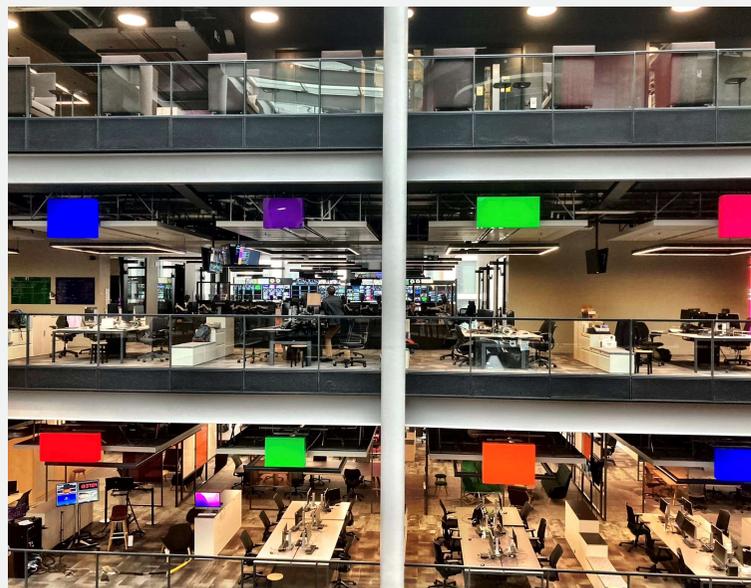
- Sufficient space for people to move freely
- Clear sightlines – employees have clear view of the surrounding area which can help with anxiety

Cons

- Unpredictable spaces
- Higher number of individuals sharing a space results in less individual control
- Difficult to control sensory environment

Research shows that employees are less likely to rate their workplace environment favourably when they have higher numbers of desks within their own field of vision; and when they are facing away from the room with a relatively larger area behind their back compared to the area surrounding them. Aspects of teamwork that are negatively affected include sharing information with others, as well as team identity and cohesion. Focused work (concentration) and working productively are impacted even more so. These findings highlight the relevance of investigating detailed spatial qualities of micro-locations in workplace layouts.

Differential perceptions of teamwork, focused work and perceived productivity as an effect of desk characteristics within a workplace layout. Sailer, Koutsolampros, Pachilova, 2021



Source: Jack Hobhouse



Layout: flexible spaces

Meeting pods

Small 1- and 2-person meeting pods available provide a space for employees to go to work in an enclosed or semi-enclosed space periodically throughout the day.

- Provides greater control over sensory environment
- Encourages employees to take call away from the general workspace

Quiet zones

Quiet zones throughout the office building give your employees a choice to work from a lower sensory environment.

- Supports hypersensitivity to sensory stimuli
- Provides a to all employees with a low distraction work zone

Restorative spaces

Restorative spaces can be particularly beneficial to ensuring the wellbeing of your employees.

- Provides an environment in which your employees can regulate and recover when required
- Flexible spaces which can be uses as high or low sensory rooms
- Accessible to everyone with a clear booking system and guidelines

Meeting rooms

Making sure you have enough meeting room spaces available in a variety of sizes, to cater to the various needs of your teams is important. Ensuring that there is a clear way to book these rooms in advance and having clear guidelines about how meeting rooms should be used can be helpful.

- Fosters collaboration, communication and decision making

Breakout spaces

Having breakout spaces where individuals and teams can gather informally to work is a great investment for employee wellbeing,

- Encourages interaction and collaboration
- Promotes flexibility of movement



Wayfinding

Wayfinding describes how people navigate their physical space. Navigating a space requires an individual to process several layers of information to get to the desired location. Many factors can make wayfinding more challenging for neurodivergent people including the reliance on your senses including proprioception (body awareness) and short-term/working memory as well as processing/interpreting the communication given.

Alongside information provided within the building, it is useful to consider providing information in advance of arrival through video, photographs or use of VR.

Clearly laid out visual maps with the use of consistent keys and colour coding allow people to become familiar with the building layout



Source: visualenergysigns.com

Provide guidance to people within the building through the use of colour, lighting and the natural flow within a space



Source: fibreguard.com

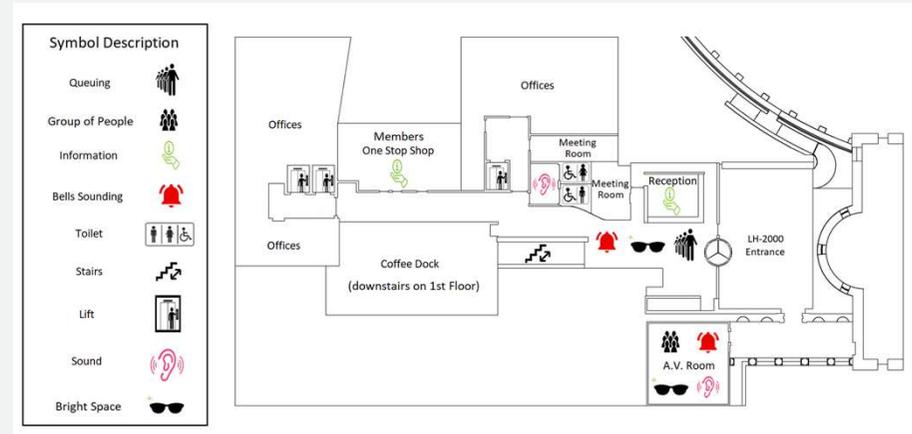


Wayfinding: useful tools



Source: robinpowered.com

Interactive maps can provide dynamic, instant guidance to its user. They can highlight specific routes, highlighting key points of interest alongside accessible and sensory-friendly pathways



Source: www.oireachtas.ie

A sensory map provides detailed information about the sensory aspects of different areas within a building including lighting, noise levels

and potential triggers. By using this tool, neurodivergent individuals can navigate the space more comfortably and avoid areas that may cause sensory overwhelm.



AI can be used as a wayfinding tool to improve navigation through real-time and personalised guidance. It can adapt to individual preferences, offering routes that minimise sensory inputs or physical obstacles for its user.



Workstation design

Hot desks vs. fixed desks

Hot desking can be challenging for neurodivergent individuals who would prefer to work from a consistent setting every day. Although hot desking can provide flexibility, it also increases ambiguity and makes it hard for individuals to set up a workspace consistent with their support needs.

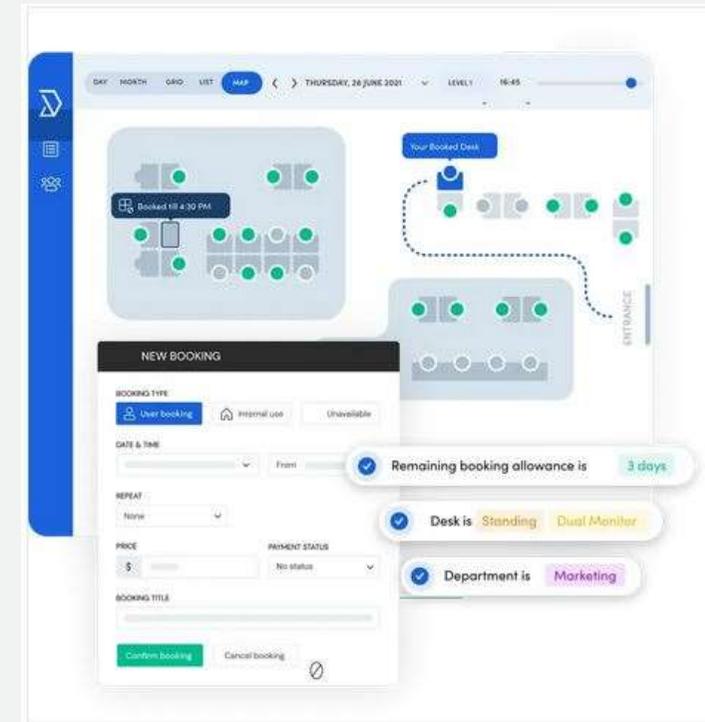
Ways to make hot desking more manageable:

- A clear booking system including the option to 'block book' a desk
- A booking system which allows you to see where your team has booked desks already
- Information provided about the location of the desk and the surrounding environment (can link to sensory map)
- Visuals of the desks/room available when booking
- Clear and consistent rules for hot desking
- Guidance on keeping the space clean and uncluttered

Fixed desks provide consistency, certainty and allow employees to personalise their workspace in a way that suits them. Employees should be given the option of having a pre-agreed fixed desk in an environment that suits their support needs.

For example:

- An autistic person may prefer to have a fixed desk that allows them to have their back to a wall and the ability to have sight of the office space to support with sensory needs.
- Someone with ADHD may choose a fixed desk further away from paths of travel, entry/exit points or other convergence zones to support with distractibility.
- A dyspraxic person may choose a fixed desk at the end of a row so they have more space to navigate in and out of their desk.



Skedda booking system



Sensory considerations

Hot desks vs. fixed desks

Sensory needs are very individual but also have potential to impact greatly on someone's productivity and wellbeing. It is therefore incredibly important to increase autonomy where possible in relation to the sensory environment within your workspaces.

- Desk lamps
- Adjustable lighting
- Blinds
- Optional acoustic screens
- Desk fans
- Normalising items like blankets and jumpers/hoodies



Lighting

- Natural Light
- Warmer colour temperature
- Adjustable lighting levels
- Use of uplights rather than ceiling lights
- Provide desk lighting



Acoustic

- Acoustic zoning
- Low DB equipment
- Provide gradual transitions on autistics between zones



Temperature

- Adjustable temperatures within different areas of the building
- Where possible, adjustable windows



Décor & materials

Colour & patterns

Not everyone experiences colour and patterns in the same way – for some use of bright colours and complex patterns might be positively visually stimulating, for others it could cause distraction and overload to the point where it becomes problematic to that individual.

Muted colours are typically more calming and decrease sensory overload in comparison to vivid colours. By having a mixture of environments making use of colour in different ways you can accommodate various sensory needs.

- Using vivid colours sparingly to define a feature or space, signage or doors can prove useful for wayfinding or zoning
- Vivid colours can also be used in locations where employees can choose if they want to use that environment e.g., employees have the option to spend as much or as little time there as they want
- Muted colours or colours found in nature (neutrals, greens, blues) can be particularly useful in areas where employees spend most of their time e.g., the main office space, cafeteria



Source: autonomous.ai



Décor & materials

Materials

Absorptive materials should be used within the space to keep noise muted, support with focus and minimize discomfort this can include, ceilings, walls and flooring but also include soft furnishings, natural materials and furniture, looking to avoid harsh or rough fabrics.

In design, use natural materials with rounded corners complementing a range of furniture providing ergonomic options.



Catering & refreshment spaces

Cafeteria

Typically, cafeterias are large, busy, high sensory rooms. Making this space in workplace quite challenging for a lot of people.

Because of this it's important to consider the positioning of the cafeteria in relation to the main work zones – it should be easily accessible to all but far enough away to avoid noise, smells, foot traffic etc. affecting the work zones.

- Communicate when the busiest hours are in the cafeteria so employees can make use of this space outside this timeframe
- Schedule in specific quiet hours within this space or use zoning to create a quiet section of the space
- Provide information on the food available in the canteen in advance
- Provide guidelines on or set spaces for employees to consume their food away from the working zones. Eating at desks should be discouraged to avoid strong smells and noises such as chewing and swallowing which some individuals may have sensitivity to.



“For me, eating in a canteen is like eating in a nightclub for a neurotypical person. It's unpleasantly loud, it's going to distract you from your food, it's anxiety-inducing.”

Jill Corbyn
autistic director of Neurodiverse Connection
The Guardian



Catering & refreshment spaces

Kitchenettes

Typically, kitchenette and refreshment zones are smaller spaces available for employees to store and access lunches, drinks etc. throughout the day. Although smaller in size, these spaces can quite often still be busy and high sensory zones.

Because of this it's important to consider the positioning of the kitchenette(s) in relation to the working zones – it should be accessible and typically closer for employees to access more frequently throughout the day. Due to the closer proximity, it's important to ensure appropriate ventilation.

- Ensure everything in the space is well labelled to support navigation and use
- Provide clear instructions on how to use the available appliances
- Provide clear guidelines on usage, food storage and cleaning. Ensure these guidelines are adhered to and spaces are checked regularly
- Provide designated spaces for employees to eat their lunch away from the working zones. Eating at desks should be discouraged to avoid strong smells and noises such as chewing and swallowing which some individuals may have sensitivity to
- Provide guidance on what is supplied e.g., a variety of tea/coffee/milk supplies and what employees are required to bring their own



Bathrooms

Bathrooms are multisensory environments that can prove challenging for many individuals.

- Provide employees with:
- Control over the environment e.g., autonomy on flushing – automatic flushing toilets can be unnerving
- The option to choose the level of noise (e.g. between using paper towels and hand dryers)
- Privacy by offering individualised unisex cubicle spaces



External space

Access to outdoor space can provide an area for activity, retreat and calmness, and help ground people within the wider urban environment. These spaces should not be overlooked when considering your employees physical and mental wellbeing.

External space can look different depending on the location of your workplace e.g., a small garden or courtyard, rooftop terrace or balcony area, but whatever form they take, these spaces provide increased opportunities for building users to regulate,

Access

Regardless of what the outdoor space looks like for your business it is important to consider the accessibility of the space.

All employees should be able to enter and exit the building to and from the outdoor working or break area and if required have access to security passes to enable this.

Guidance should be given to all employees on how to use this space appropriately and guidelines should be upheld by the business.

Biophillic design

Biophillic design where outside space is not possible connects internal spaces with the external by incorporating natural elements such as greenery, water features and natural light encouraging a transition between indoors and outdoors. This approach enhances the well-being of building users by encouraging a connection with nature and promoting a calming and restorative environment.



Commute

The location of buildings and quality of surrounding mobility infrastructure impact the accessibility of workplaces by private, public and active transport, as does the timing and regularity of travel. By thinking about how your employees travel to work you can create an environment that caters to those needs.

Facilities

Make walking, running or cycling an accessible choice by providing dedicated facilities where employees can change, shower and store their equipment and any personal belongings. Clearly signpost cycle entry and storage points in and outside the building.

This not only promotes positive physical activity for the employee but also supports the environment by reducing the number of employees driving to and from work.

Timings & remote work

Employees may find frequent community impacts their productivity, particularly when travelling during busy peak times when uncertainty and noise is highest. Having the freedom to adjust work hours and work remotely empowers employees to manage their own needs.

A universal approach ensures there is less need for additional accommodations.

Enabling technology

Work with local authorities to ensure public transport and cycling routes are available in wayfinding apps. Assistive technology can improve the accessibility of public transport. Bookable parking can be used to allocate parking to people who need it most.

Improving the quality of the commute for all employees will improve talent retention, while enabling technologies can help those most affected by transport infrastructure not designed to accommodate their needs.

Parking

For many people, driving to and from the workplace is the only manageable commuting option. That's because reliance on public transport can come with uncertainty (e.g., train cancellations) as well as high sensory environments (peak travel times, lots of people, noisy). However, driving to work can come with its own stressors.

- Provide adequate parking facilities
- Provide access to a clear and easy to use, online booking system to guarantee availability
- Potential for allocated spaces, if required



Reasonable adjustments, assistive aids and technology

Examples of adjustments, aids & technology

There are many adjustments you can put in place to support your employees that do not rely on altering the fixed environment. These adjustments should be considered and put into place to support your employees with sensory and information processing differences, when you have reviewed the fixed environment and found no changes can be made.

- Supports to minimise or block unwanted noise e.g., ear plugs, noise cancelling headphones, ear defender
- Supports to minimise visual stimulation e.g., screen filters, sunglasses, cap
- Supports to adjust temperature e.g., desk fans, blankets
- Support to help with proprioception e.g., weighted blankets, tape on floor to indicate boundaries of desk space, corner guards or bumpers on desk
- Stimulation tools e.g., fidget spinners, tactile objects, seating that has movement (rock or tilt)



auticon is a social enterprise with the mission to address the inequalities in employment for neurodivergent adults .

To find out more about our work visit us at auticon.com/uk or on your preferred social media [@auticon_uk](https://twitter.com/auticon_uk):

